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LETTER DATED 16 FEBRUARY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you a press statement, issued on 15 February 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, in connection with Security Council resolution 1227 (1999) of 10 February 1999 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Press release dated 15 February 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia

Ethiopia's response to the latest Security Council resolution

When the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1227 (1999), on 10 February 1999, on the crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea, history appeared to have repeated itself. The people of Ethiopia, who have maintained their independence for thousands of years, on their own and against all odds, had once again the misfortune of placing full confidence in collective security. The frustration and the disappointment they faced in this regard is highlighted by the infamy the League of Nations is remembered for. The imposition of an arms embargo by the League of Nations on Italy, the colonial aggressor, and on Ethiopia, the victim of colonial aggression, is still fresh in the memories of the Ethiopian people. The League of Nations felt the steps were necessary for peace, and because equity demanded that the League be evenhanded. This looks farcical now because subsequent events have made most able to see the injustice behind the decision and the double standard for which the League of Nations is remembered. But double standards hardly seem to have died with the League of Nations. It is Ethiopia's fate again, as a victim, to be treated in the same way as the aggressor.

This is the most unique feature of Security Council resolution 1227 (1999) on the crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The double standard is well reflected, inter alia, in paragraph 7 of the resolution, which strongly urges all States to end immediately all sales of arms and munition to Ethiopia and Eritrea. On the surface, this sounds fair and appropriate. But this is patently misleading.

All third parties, without exception, that have at one time or another been seized with the crisis have realized that aggression was committed by Eritrea against Ethiopia. This realization has been the basis for the United States-Rwandese peace plan and for the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Framework Agreement. Nor is it lost on the Security Council that Ethiopia has been a victim of aggression. Its endorsement of the OAU Framework Agreement, whose core demands are the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from forcibly occupied Ethiopian territory and the return of the status quo ante, rests on the realization that Eritrea is the aggressor.

A country whose territory has been occupied, and which therefore has all the legitimate right of self-defense under the Charter of the United Nations and under international law, is being told it has no right to defend itself against invasion by a country that has not only committed aggression but has also refused to accept all peace proposals that have been made so far.

Ethiopia has accepted all peace proposals made so far, including the United States-Rwandese proposal and that of OAU. Ethiopia has also extended full cooperation to all third parties that have made their good offices available,

while Eritrea, apart from rejecting all peace proposals, has also been engaged in a smear campaign against virtually all those involved in peace-making.

The Security Council knows where the truth lies and what the obstacles are to peace. There can be no confusion on this. In a presidential statement of 13 November 1998, the Council appeared to throw its weight behind the OAU peace proposal when it endorsed the Framework Agreement as fair and balanced.

In resolution 1226 (1999) adopted on 29 January 1999, the Council, expressing its strong support for the Framework Agreement, affirmed that the Agreement provided the best hope for peace between the two parties and called for its implementation without delay. Aware that it was Eritrea which has been the obstacle to peace and to the implementation of the OAU Framework Agreement, the same Council resolution, welcoming Ethiopia's acceptance of the OAU brokered peace plan, strongly urged Eritrea to accept the Framework Agreement as the basis for a peaceful resolution of the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea without delay.

That the Security Council should turn around suddenly and adopt resolution 1227 (1999) with provisions which signal denial to the victim of aggression of its rights of self-defence provided for under the Charter of the United Nations and sanctioned by international law, is as puzzling as it is unfair. On the other hand, the same resolution obviously would have the effect of encouraging the aggressor to persist in its intransigence and to continue even more to frustrate the OAU's effort.

When Eritrea faced a growing international pressure calling on it to accept the OAU peace plan and found itself pinned down, it responded to this by a new and large-scale offensive on 6 February 1999, with the calculated objective of creating a generalized sense of escalating crisis with the hope of undermining and scuttling the OAU peace plan. Security Council resolution 1227 (1999) is a reward for this dangerous Eritrean gamble. It took no account of how much the people of Ethiopia would be wounded and hurt by it.

Ethiopia remains, as always, committed to peace. Even at this juncture, when prospects for a peaceful resolution have dimmed, it remains committed to the OAU Framework Agreement, which awaits implementation. This is a peace proposal which has been crafted by African Heads of State with a great deal of effort. It cannot be tampered with, and any attempt to do so would indeed be a disservice to peace and another thinly disguised step to reward aggression. Ethiopia would not accept this, as it would not accept demands that it relinquish rights that it has as a sovereign State, most particularly in this instance its rights of self-defence. Ethiopia has always been flexible in the quest for peace. It would be a gross misunderstanding, however, to mistake this for a lack of resolve to protect the rights and dignity of the Ethiopian people.